

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 DEAE-00 SNM-05

HA-05 NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 /062 W

-----035469 062013Z /64

O R 061855Z JUL 78

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 828

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEGUCIGALPA 3185

EO 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINT, SHUM, SNAR, HO

SUBJECT: NARCOTICS SCANDAL: ARREST OF TIEMPO DIRECTOR CAUSES STORM:
OTHER EVENTS

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 3044, (B) TEGUCIGALPA 1311

1. SUMMARY: MANUEL GAMERO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF "TIEMPO" DETAINED JULY 5, PRESUMABLY BECAUSE OF HIS MEETING SECRETLY WITH RAUL MATA, WHO ALSO CAPTURED BY POLICE AFTER FOUR MONTHS SEARCH. INTER-AMERICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION HAS CABLED MELGAR REQUESTING INFORMATION ON GAMERO. AT THE SAME TIME, AN INTERVIEW IN "TRIBUNA" REVEALED THAT LT. BARAHONA, HELD NOW FOR TWO MONTHS, HAS ALLEGEDLY NOT YET BEEN QUESTIONED BY HIGH-LEVEL COMMISSION FORMED TO INVESTIGATE NARCOTICS SCANDAL. PUBLIC REACTION TO ARMED FORCES COMMUNIQUE (REF A), WHICH HAS VARIED FROM OUTRIGHT DISBELIEF TO POLITE SKEPTICISM NEVERTHELESS SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN TURNING TO OTHER MATTERS AFTER MONTHS OF PUBLIC ATTENTION. THESE EVENTS HAVE BROUGHT THE NARCOTICS SCANDAL BACK TO CENTER STAGE AND RAISED ISSUE OF PRESS FREEDOM. END SUMMARY.

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2. MANUEL GAMERO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF DAILY "TIEMPO" WAS DETAINED JULY 5 AND IS BEING HELD ON REQUEST OF CRIMINAL COURT JUDGE IN SAN PEDRO SULA. CHARGES HAVE NOT BEEN MADE PUBLIC, BUT PRESUMABLY ARE BASED ON HIS HAVING VISITED RAUL MATA, (NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH ALLEGED NARCOTICS KINGPIN RAMON MATTA, WHO IS IN BOGOTA), WHILE MATA WAS IN HIDING FROM POLICE. MATA IS ONE OF GUNMEN

ACCUSED IN FERRARI KIDNAPPING AND MURDER.

3. GAMERO'S DETENTION, AS WELL AS SEVERAL OTHERS INCLUDING "TIEMPO'S" CARTOONIST, WAS SUBJECT OF SPECIAL RADIO REPORTS, PRIME TOPIC OF CONVERSATION AT VENEZUELAN NATIONAL DAY RECEPTION, AND MAJOR IN ALL NEWSPAPERS.

4. RAMON VILLEDA BURMUDEZ, EDITOR OF "PRENSA", DESCRIBED TO EMBOFF A PROPOSED LAW FOR PRESS REGULATION WHICH HE SAID HAD BEEN CIRCULATING AMONG MILITARY RECENTLY. HE SAID HE FEARED PUBLIC REACTION TO GAMERO'S ARREST WOULD RESULT IN GOVERNMENT PASSING LAW AND LAMENTED NO JOURNALIST OR PUBLISHER HAS BEEN CONSULTED ON DRAFT. ALTHOUGH FOREGOING HAS APPEARED IN PRINT, VILLEDA ALSO TOLD EMBOFF THAT IN ENTIRE NARCOTICS SCANDAL THE MILITARY HAS NOT ASKED OR TAKEN ADVICE FROM ANY CIVILIANS. THIS REFLECTS A SIMILAR COMMENT MADE TO EMBOFF PREVIOUSLY BY CESAR BATRES, ADVISER TO THE CHIEF OF STATE, BOTH IMPLYING THEIR BELIEF THE ISSUE IS BEING BADLY HANDLED.

5. "TIEMPO" HAS CABLED INTER-AMERICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION (IAPA), NEW YORK TIMES, WASHINGTON POST AP, UPI AND NUMEROUS OTHER PAPERS PROTESTING DETENTION. IAPA HAS ALREADY RESPONDED WITH A CABLE TO CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR EXPRESSING ITS SURPRISE AND ASKING FOR FURTHER INFORMATION. "TIEMPO" HAD A BLANK HQACE FOR AN EDITORIAL TODAY (JULY 6) AND IN ADDITION IS RUNNING FULL-PAGE REPRINTS OF GENERAL MELGAR'S CONFIDENTIAL

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PREVIOUS SPEECHES PRAISING PRESS FREEDOM. ALL PAPERS ARE PRINTING REACTIONS FROM ORGANATIONS ACROSS THE SPECTRUM PROTESTING GAMERO'S DETENTION, IN SPITE OF RECOGNITION ON PART OF SOME THAT DETENTION PER SE IS NOT ARBITRARY BUT RESULTS FROM A COURT ORDER AND THAT GAMERO HAS LEGAL ASSISTANCE.

6. DETENTION OF GAMERO HAS OVERSHADOWED TWO OTHER DEVELOPMENTS. AN ENTERPRISING REPORTER FROM "TRIBUNA" MANAGED TO GET IN TO SEE FORMER INTERPOL CHIEF, LT JUAN ANGEL BARAHONA, WHO HAS BEEN HELD BY MILITARY OVER TWO MONTHS. BARAHONA CLAIMED HE HAD NOT TALKED TO ANYBODY IN THAT TIME AND HAD NOT EVEN BEEN QUESTIONED BY CIVILIAN JUDGES OR HIGH LEVEL MILITARY COMMISSION. IF TRUE, THIS WOULD BE UNUSUAL. IT WAS LT BARAHONA'S PUBLIC ACCUSATIONS WHICH FORCED THE NOMINATION OF AN INVESTIGATING COMMISSION. FAILURE TO INTERVIEW BARAHONA, IF CONFIRMED, WILL CONTRIBUTE FURTHER TO PUBLIC'S RELUCTANCE TO ACCEPT COMMISSION REPORT AT FACE VALUE.

7. THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF THE HONDURAN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION HAS ALREADY NOTED THAT THE HONDURAN CONSTITUTION ALLOWS THE HOLDING INCOMUNICADO FOR 48 HOURS

OF A PERSON UNDER INVESTIGATION AND FOR ONLY SIX DAYS BEFORE CHARGES MUST BE PRESSED OR THE PERSON RELEASED. THAT IS, UNDER HONDURAN LAW, IF THE JUDGE FINDS "SUFFICIENT REASONABLE REASON" TO HOLD A PERSON FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION, HE CAN DO SO FOR UP TO SIX DAYS. THIS IS APPARENTLY WHAT HAS HAPPENED WITH MANUAL GAMERO, ALTHOUGH NOT WITH BARAHONA. THE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEGUCIGALPA 3185

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION HAS STATED IT INTENDS TO INVESTIGATE BARAHONA'S DETENTION AND OTHER NARCOTICS SCANDAL RELATED MATTERS FURTHER.

8. OTHER DEVELOPMENT IS THE CAPTURE OF RAUL MATA AFTER A SEARCH OF OVER FOUR MONTHS. GAMERO HAD MANAGED TO INTERVIEW MATA, BUT REFUSED TO TELL THE POLICE WHERE HE WAS HIDING, CITING JOURNALISTIC PRIVILEGE.

9. COMMENT: WHETHER IT IS OR NOT, GAMERO'S DETENTION IS BEING TAKEN AS AN ATTACK ON PRESS FREEDOM, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE ATTENTION PAID TO GAMERO IS COMPARED TO BARAHONA'S NEGLECT. "TIEMPO" HAS BEEN THE MOST ACTIVE OF HONDURAS' NEWSPAPERS IN SEEKING INFORMATION ON THE NARCOTICS SCANDAL AND CALLING FOR A THOROUGH INVESTIGATION. MILITARY OFFICERS HAVE REACTED STRONGLY AGAINST WHAT THEY VIEW AS PRESS SENSATIONALISM, WHEN NOT OUTRIGHT AND INTERESTED DISTORTION. IN A PREVIOUS FIT OF INDIGNATION THE ARMED FORCES MADE A NOT-SO-VEILED THREAT (REF B) AGAINST "TIEMPO". THIS AND THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNIQUE (REF A) ARE NOW BEING CITED TO

DEMONSTRATE THAT THE GOH IS DELIBERATELY SINGLING OUT
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GAMERO, IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT GAMERO, UNLIKE BARAHONA,
IS BEING HELD LEGALLY.

10. PUBLIC REACTION TO LAST WEEK'S COMMUNIQUE HAS VARIED
FROM OUTRIGHT DISBELIEF TO POLITE SKEPTICISM. NEVERTHELESS,
PUBLIC INTEREST AS SUCH WAS TURNING TO OTHER MATTERS AND IT
SEEMED LIKELY IT WOULD ONLY BE REKINDLED WITH FURTHER
SENSATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS, SUCH AS HAVE OCCURRED WITH SOME
REGULARITY IN THIS CASE. EVEN THOUGH FIRST, HIGHLY EMOTIONAL
REACTIONS ARE LIKELY TO SUBSIDE AND EVEN IF
GAMERO IS RELEASED WITH APOLIGIES, THE ISSUE IS NOW BACK
ON PAGE ONE, WITH THE FURTHER QUESTION OF POSSIBLE PRESS
RESTRICTIONS OUT IN THE OPEN.
JARAMILLO

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Message Attributes

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